DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 232 198 CS 207 745

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TITLE Reporting Conflict in the Press, by Degree of Pluralism, Newspaper Type, and Ownership: A Comparison of 83 Minnesota Newspapers, 1965 and 1979.
PUB DATE Aug 83
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (66th, Corvallis, OR, August 6-9, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Change; *Community Problems; Comparative Analysis; Conflict; Content Analysis; Information Sources; Local Issues; *Mass Media Effects; *Media Research; *Newspapers; *News Reporting
IDENTIFIERS Media Ownership

ABSTRACT

Data from 83 Minnesota newspapers support the hypothesis that as communities become more pluralistic, their newspapers will report more conflict. Between 1965 and 1979, Minnesota saw an increase in population and proportionate increases in income from manufacturing and agriculture. During this period of growing pluralism, the amount of newspaper space devoted to news, editorial comment, and reporting of conflict within communities and local governments also rose sharply. In addition to an overall increase, the data revealed changing patterns in conflict reporting. While the absolute amount of conflict reporting remained greatest in the most pluralistic regions, the increase of such reporting between 1965 and 1979 was greatest in less pluralistic areas and in weekly newspapers. Additionally, the 1965 finding that dailies reported more local conflict than weekly newspapers was reversed in 1979, a change related to the shifting ownership status of daily newspapers. As more and more dailies come under out-of-state ownership, the percentage of space devoted to reporting conflict decreases. Other factors influencing the changing pattern of conflict reporting appear to be the increasing interdependence among communities and the greater role of state and federal agencies in local government. (Author/MM)

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REPORTING CONFLICT IN THE PRESS, BY DEGREE OF PLURALISM, NEWSPAPER TYPE, AND OWNERSHIP: A comparison of 83 Minnesota newspapers, 1965 and 1979

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication, Corvallis, Oregon, August 6, 1983.

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Abstract

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G. A. Donohue, C. N. Olien and P. J. Tichenor
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The focal point of this study is conflict reporting as it relates to changes in pluralism, newspaper type, and newspaper ownership.

Data from the 83 community newspapers support the hypothesis that as the system becomes more pluralistic, community newspapers will report more conflict. Between 1965 and 1979, Minnesota saw an increase in population, a proportionate increase in income from manufacturing and a proportionate decrease in income from farming. During this period of increasing pluralism, the newspapers increased their newshole sharply, and reported more conflict, both in all local sectors combined and in the local government area. At both points in time, conflict reporting was greatest in the more pluralistic regions. These increases were greatest, however, in the less pluralistic regions and in weekly newspapers.

The 1965 finding that daily newspapers reported more local conflict than weekly papers was reversed in 1979, a pattern which is related to the changing ownership status of daily newspapers. Dailies which had come under out-of-state ownership in 1979 reported less conflict that year than those whose ownership was within the state. Furthermore, the dailies under out-of-state ownership contained less conflict, on the average, than they had in 1965 when they were locally owned.

This changing pattern of conflict reporting appears to be related to increased interdependence among communities, the increased role of state and federal agencies in local government, and changes in the organization of mass media, including the pullback of metropolitan newspapers and the shift toward nonlocal ownership.

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George A. Donohue, Clarice N. Olien and Phillip J. Tichenor*

Structural diversification is a fundamental aspect of social change. New and innovative forms of social organization result in a multiplicity of power centers serving diverse interest groups. Such pluralism has inherent conflict, the control of which is a central concern for system maintenance and achievement of goals (1).

Conflict, whether arising among governmental agencies, labor and management groups, or political parties, is engendered by scarcity of resources, particularly social power. Courts, formal labor-management negotiations, hearing procedures and boards of inquiry are among the mechanisms which exist for managing conflict. Newspaper reporting of conflict, which is the focus of this study, is basic to all forms of public controversy.

This paper presents an analysis of conflict reporting in a sample of newspapers in Minnesota communities with varying degrees of structural pluralism at two points of time. The focal point of the inquiry is conflict reporting, as it relates to changes in pluralism, newspaper type and newspaper ownership.

Conflict reporting by any given newspaper will depend upon the characteristics of the social structure in which that newspaper exists (2).

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The conclusion that the amount of conflict reporting by newspapers is lower under conditions of lower degrees of pluralism has been supported by a number of researchers (3). Vidich and Bensman claimed that crucial issues failed to get consideration in the local weekly press; Paletz, Reichert and McIntyre found a small daily playing down certain kinds of conflict; Edelstein and Schulz found more than half of the leaders of a small community believing that newspapers should publicize controversies only after discussion by "others" (4,5,6). Janowitz found the community press on the outer fringes of an urban area limiting sharply its reporting of local controversy (7). Hvistendahl found the small town press containing little public record information that would facilitate understanding of local controversies, and Kearl found the Wisconsin weekly press minimizing coverage of even the ritualistic conflicts of political campaigns (8,9). As social systems become more pluralistic, the increasing specialization requires that a greater proportion of communication be at the formal level, including communication about system conflicts, including more conflict reporting by the mass media (10,11). As structural pluralism increases over time, the media as a whole would be expected to report more conflict which such pluralism implies. Such an interpretation may be applied to Cole's finding that the amount of conflict in science news articles in four large daily newspapers increased sharply from 1950 to 1970, a period of growing pluralism in the system (12).

This paper deals with three primary hypotheses:

1. As the system as a whole becomes more pluralistic, community newspapers generally will report more conflict.
2. Daily newspapers will report more conflict than weekly or semi-weekly newspapers.
3. Locally owned newspapers will report more conflict than non-locally owned newspapers.

Study data and procedures

Data for this analysis include findings from a content study of 83 Minnesota newspapers published in 1965, compared with the same papers in 1979. The original 1965 study included 88 community newspapers, of which five suspended publication before 1979 (13). The 83 communities analyzed here are in 79 different counties, all except two are county seats, and each is a major site of governmental activity. The communities were originally chosen because each in 1965 had a county agricultural extension office (14). The newspapers in 1965 included 49 weeklies, 15 semi-weeklies and 19 dailies. In 1979, the 83 papers consisted of 52 weeklies, 10 semi-weeklies and 21 dailies (15).

For each year, content was analyzed in four editions of each newspaper during February. For weeklies, this meant every edition for the month; for semi-weeklies, it was every other edition and for dailies it was one edition for each week.

Local conflict was coded as the space devoted to reporting about manifestly differing positions or statements about a public issue from at least two persons, factions or interest groups in the community. The question was not whether an article reported about a subject of controversy, but whether the article made clear that a controversy was involved and who the participants were. Coders measured the actual space devoted to controversy in column inches (16).

Conflict identified by this procedure was further categorized according to whether it involved local government. "Local government" for this purpose was confined to the legislative agencies, such as city councils and county boards, and to administrative units of these governments. Conflict was coded as "nongovernmental" if it dealt with education, law enforcement, courts, churches, business organizations, or other local bodies or groups and did not involve a unit of local government. Differences or disputes primarily between

individuals, such as civil suits, were not coded as "conflict" unless they clearly involved a body such as those mentioned above.

The primary indicators of structural pluralism included county and community population, per capita income, percent labor and proprietors' income from manufacturing, and percent labor and proprietors' income in farming. Data on these characteristics of communities, and counties in which they are located, are primarily from Census reports or estimates. The 1980 Census data were not available except for total population; the income data employed are from Census estimates as compiled by other agencies.

Changes in system pluralism, 1960-80

A shift toward increasing pluralism occurred in the 83 counties between 1960 and 1980 (table 1). Population for both counties and communities showed overall increases of 16-17 percent, while per capita income nearly doubled from 1965 to 1979. Overall, income from manufacturing increased from 13.7 to 17.1 percent from 1965 to 1979, while income from farming dropped from 24.5 to 18.3 percent. A shift from farming to manufacturing as a source of income is a principle indicator of increasing pluralism in the system as a whole.

The breakdown in Table 1 also indicates the differences between regions. The Northeast is a more pluralistic region, with the lowest proportion in farming and the second highest income from manufacturing. This region, including the Mesabi Iron Range, has a corporate outlook and a tradition of outside investment and control of its principal enterprises, which historically has included mining, logging and, in recent years, tourism. Duluth is the largest population center as well as the location of major economic and governmental decision-making agencies for the region.

The Southeast is also a more pluralistic region and is undergoing considerable change. Originally dominated by farming, it has shown higher

population growth and has a higher percent of income from manufacturing than

Table 1. Characteristics of 83 Minnesota communities, two periods in time.

		Region				
		North east (n:18)	South east (n:21)	South west (n:20)	North west (n:24)	Total (n:83)
Average county population,	1960	60,527	47,843	18,691	17,6881	34,849
	1980	70,120	62,766	17,976	18,841	40,867
Average community pop.,	1960	7,362	9,169	4,902	3,777	6,190
	1980	7,944	11,515	5,759	3,983	7,176
Per capita income,	1965	$ 2,841	2,737	2,368	2,198	2,437
	1979	$ 4,711	5,310	4,649	4,361	4,746
Percent labor & proprietor's income in manufacturing,	1965	15.5%	22.1%	9.5%	8.6%	13.7%
	1979	17.8%	25.9%	14.9%	10.9%	17.1%
Percent labor & proprietor's income in farming,	1965	11.1%	22.7%	30.1%	31.6%	24.5%
	1979	4.5%	15.8%	31.0%	20.4%	18.3%

Source: U.S. Census, Minnesota Department of Economic Development

any other region, while percent of income from farming is lower than in either the Southwest or Northwest. The Southeast contains a mixture of food processing plants, implement manufacturing, medical services and educational institutions.

The Southwest and Northwest are less pluralistic than the other two regions, with the Southwest continuing to have the highest dependence on farming; it was the only region of the four in which percent of income from farming did not decline from 1965 to 1979. At the same time, the Southwest

showed a greater increase in income from manufacturing (from 9.5 to 14.9 percent) than did the Northwest (from 8.6 to 10.9 percent). The drop in percent of income from farming in the Northwest, without a corresponding rise in manufacturing income, suggests increasing dependence on other sectors such as services, public employment, and wholesale and retail trade.

Change in newspapers and conflict reporting

The 83 newspapers in the study increased their newshole, or the space devoted to news and editorial content, between 1965 and 1979, by nearly three-fifths (table 2). The increase was greater in the Southwest and Northwest regions than in the Northeast or Southeast. This greater increase in

Table 2. Newshole and conflict reporting in four editions of 83 Minnesota newspapers, 1965 and 1979.

	Region					
Averages per edition	North-east (n:18)	South-east (n:21)	South-west (n:20)	North-west (n:24)	Total (n:83)	
Average column inches of newshole, 1965	837.8	1006.7	831.4	873.1	889.2	
Average column inches of newshole, 1979	1247.5	1501.7	1412.0	1431.2	1404.6	
Average column inches of local conflict, all sectors, 1965	27.2	17.2	8.3	9.5	14.9	*
% of newshole per edition	.90%	.33%	.25%	.25%	.41%	*
Average column inches of local conflict, all sectors, 1979	53.2	48.2	35.8	45.2	45.2	
% of newshole per edition	1.21%	.78%	.76%	.77%	.86%	
Average column inches of conflict in local government, 1965	21.6	12.0	7.2	6.1	11.2	*
% of newshole per edition	.75%	.23%	.22%	.17%	.32%	@
Average column inches of conflict in local government, 1979	34.4	22.7	7.9	16.4	19.8	*
% of newshole per edition	.83%	.38%	.20%	.29%	.41%	*

* = difference across regions, $p < .05$
@ = difference across regions, $p = .059$

newshole in the less pluralistic regions may reflect a restructuring of the entire mass communication system, such as the pullback of metropolitan newspapers from outlying regions of the state.

The evidence in Table 2 supports the conclusion that local conflict reporting as a whole has increased as the system has become more pluralistic. That is, conflict reporting in all sectors (middle section of the table) increased from 14.9 column inches in 1965 to 45.2 in 1979. This increase is significant at the .001 level, and the quantities reflect an increase from .41 to .86 percent of the newshole during the 14-year period. But what is evident in the data is that the increase in local conflict reporting in all sectors, between 1965 and 1979, was more rapid in the less pluralistic regions than in the more pluralistic regions. While the absolute amount of conflict reporting in all sectors in 1979 was still lower in the less pluralistic regions, the differences are far less distinct than in 1965. As with the increase in newshole, this greater increase in conflict reporting in the less pluralistic regions may be related to increasing dependence on other centers of power in the system and to the pullback of metropolitan newspapers from rural areas. In reporting of local government conflict, while there is an increase in the absolute amount of column inches from 1965 to 1979, there is little change in reporting as a percentage of newshole. However, unlike the conflict in all sectors, the difference in local government reporting across regions, which was evident in 1965, persists in 1979.

Newspaper type and conflict reporting

Using newspaper type as the independent variable, one finds mixed support for the hypothesis that daily newspapers will report more local conflict than weeklies or semi-weeklies (table 3). There is a different pattern of conflict reporting across types of newspapers in 1979, compared with 1965. Indeed, the

data indicate that weeklies have almost a four-fold increase in column inches devoted to conflict in all sectors, and in 1979 have a higher percentage of newshole devoted to conflict than dailies, a reversal of 1965. While there has been a slight newshole increase in daily newspapers, there is a greater increase in newshole in weeklies. With local government conflict, while the general pattern across newspaper types is similar, there is neither as great

Table 3. Newshole and Conflict Reporting According to Type of Newspaper, 1965 and 1979.

Averages per edition	Weeklies 1965 (n:49) 1979 (n:52)	Semi-weeklies (n:15) (n:10)	Dailies (n:19) (n:21)	Total (n:83) (n:83)
Average column inches of newshole, 1965	775.4	792.4	1259.2	889.2 *
Average column inches of newshole, 1979	1398.5	1434.4	1405.5	1404.6
Average column inches of conflict, all sectors, 1965	11.3	9.3	28.9	14.9 *
% of newshole per edition	.40	.29%	.55%	.41%
Average column inches of conflict, all sectors, 1979	52.3	24.9	37.2	45.2
% of newshole per edition	1.0%	.51%	.68%	.86%
Average column inches of conflict in local government, 1965	9.1	5.2	21.4	11.2 *
% of newshole per edition	.34%	.15%	.42%	.32%
Average column inches of conflict in local government, 1979	21.7	11.0	19.6	19.8 *
% of newshole per edition	.45%	.20%	.42%	.41%

* difference across newspaper type = $p < .05$

a change in column inches nor in percent of newshole, compared with conflict in all sectors.

Controlling for Regional Pluralism

A finding that appears inconsistent with the pluralism hypothesis is that semi-weeklies had proportionately less newshole space (as well as less abso-

lute space) devoted to conflict, for both years, than either weeklies or dailies. When one looks at newspaper type by region, one finds a partial explanation for this finding. These papers are in communities which tend to be larger than those having weekly papers and smaller than those with dailies, but have the least conflict of all. As is apparent from table 4, conflict reporting must be analyzed as a joint function of region and type of

Table 4. Reporting of conflict in local government, according to type of newspaper and region, 1965 and 1979.

	North-east (n:18)	South-east (n:21)	South-west (n:20)	North-west (n:24)
Ave. col. inches local govt. conflict, 1965				
Weeklies	19.5 (11)	5.2 (11)	6.1 (10)	6.8 (17)
Semi-weeklies	0 (1)	7.7 (3)	5.8 (7)	3.5 (4)
Dailies	29.2 (6)	24.7 (7)	14.0 (3)	5.3 (3)
Ave. col. inches local govt. conflict, 1979				
Weeklies	32.3 (11)	27.7 (13)	12.4 (12)	16.4 (16)
Semi-weeklies	48.0 (1)	--	0 (4)	12.4 (5)
Dailies	36.2 (6)	14.6 (8)	2.0 (4)	23.0 (3)

newspaper. First, it should be noted that 11 of the 15 semi-weeklies in 1965 and 9 of the 10 in 1979 were in the two least pluralistic regions, the southwest and northwest. Although the numbers are very small, the breakdown for 1965 indicates that with region controlled, the differences between semi-weeklies and weeklies are minor except for the northeast where the one semi-weekly reported no local government conflict.

In the southeast and southwest in 1979, the dailies clearly have less conflict content than the weekly newspapers and the four semi-weeklies in the Southwest contained no conflict at all. Two of those semi-weeklies were under out-of-state multiple ownership in 1979, a point which is discussed in more detail below.

These data suggest that the concentration of the semi-weekly papers in the low pluralism regions explains part but not necessarily all of the tendency for those papers to report minimal amounts of conflict in local government.

Community characteristics and conflict reporting

In addition to regional differences, one might ask whether individual community indicators of pluralistic structure are related to reporting of conflict. The correlations among these indicators and conflict tend to be stronger for 1965 than for 1979 (Table 5). Moreover, these correlations suggest that the relationship between community characteristics and the general makeup of the newspaper also changed during the period. The most striking indicator of that point is the strong correlation between newshole size and community population in 1970 ($r = .74$) and the much lower correlation in 1979 ($r = .22$). A second such indicator is the declining relationship between newspaper circulation and newshole (from .78 to .30) as well as the disappearance of the relationship between local government conflict and newspaper type or circulation.

In considering these declining correlations, two basic changes in the social structure should be pointed out. The first is the changing degree of interdependence, from 1965 to 1979, between communities and external agencies. Increasing diversification means greater dependence of small communities on both public and private agencies, and therefore in their relationship with larger communities. The second is a pronounced change in that part of the community related to newspaper organization, based on changes in technology and in absentee ownership. Newspapers have a community leadership role and are potentially more aware of community interdependence than is the lay citizen; the purposive communicators from agencies are in direct contact with

Table 5: Correlations, newshole and conflict in newspapers and characteristics of 83 communities, 1965 and 1975

Characteristic of community	1965 Newshole	1965 Local Govt. Conflict	1979 Newshole	1979 Local Govt. Conflict
Population, 1970 (1980)(1)	.74*	.36*	.22*	-.09
Northeast Region	-.07	.28*	-.15	.26*
Southwest Region	-.08	-.12	.01	-.23*
Southeast Region	.18	.02	.10	.06
Metropolitan Location	.28*	.42*	.32*	.00
Farm Income, 1962 (1979)	-.28*	-.35*	-.12	-.22*
Newspaper Type (2)	-.52*	-.29*	.00	.04
Newspaper Circulation	.78*	.34*	.30*	-.04
Multiple correlation	.80	.52	.52	.39
Significance of R	.000	.002	.002	.12 (n.s.)

(1) Population figures used are from the 1970 census for the 1965 newshole data, and 1980 for the 1979 newshole data.

(2) Newspaper type is a dichotomous variable, scored so that 1 = weekly or semi-weekly, and 0 = daily. Thus, the coefficient of -.52 for 1965 under newshole means that dailies had higher average newshole spaces on the average, in each individual edition, than did weeklies or semi-weeklies.

(3) The correlation between newshole and local government conflict is $r = .32$ for 1965 and $r = .01$ for 1979.

* = $p < .05$

editors. These media are operating as transmission belts with the outside community, a point reinforced by a categorization of the non-governmental conflict stories reported in 1979. More than two-thirds of these stories in the 83 papers dealt with conflicts in education, labor, business, or the environment, all involving centers of control from outside the community and the relationship between the community and society at large.

Newspaper ownership and conflict reporting

As suggested above, there appear to be fundamental changes in the organization of metropolitan vs. rural areas, during the 1965-79 period, that have consequences for newspaper content. The era of the old-style linotype and letterpress was coming to a close in the 1960s, as, first, skilled printers and operators retired and, second, local needs for reduced labor costs led to offset-press production and more efficient printing. With this form of organization, layout and paste-up could be handled by relatively unskilled workers and printing could be done on contract or through joint ownership in a central, modernized plant. This period also brought some breaks with the tradition of family ownership of community newspapers, and a variety of multiple ownership arrangements came upon the world of the community press. Whereas all 83 papers were locally owned in 1965, four of the 62 nondailies and 10 of the 21 daily papers were owned by organizations with headquarters out of the state in 1979.

The possible implications of this ownership shift require further analysis. Ownership is one condition of control within the total framework of mass media in the larger system. Media today, newspapers included, operate to an increasing degree on a principle in which economics and market criteria are the basis for operational decision-making and, therefore, the decisive forces. A "market media" orientation has evolved through a historical metamorphosis, from a time when the controlling motivation was ideology of publication to one in which the guiding theme is investment for pecuniary gain (17,18,19,20,21). The familiar slogan "all the news fit to print" under the logotype might correctly be changed to "all the news that makes a profit."

Modern commercial domination of newspapers is an outgrowth of the same forces that led to the consumption-based economic system that now prevails. It originated in the quest for mass markets and the implications which such

market developments hold for vehicles of communication. Modern marketing requires access to large, heterogeneous markets which must necessarily be reached by secondary, rather than primary contacts. Newspapers emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries as principal outlets for reaching a mass audience, with advertising becoming the predominant means for support of the medium. Now, the underlying orientation may have shifted to the point where advertising is more than a source of support for newspapers; a primary function for newspapers today is to provide vehicles for advertising messages, sent to audiences of potential product consumers.

Throughout commercial organization, there has been a shift to profit maximization, rather than emphasis on a primary product, as a criterion for organizational success. A company emphasized the automobile, camera, or line of footwear as a product; newspapers emphasized the primary product of information. While all businesses historically required sufficient financial return to survive, the choice was generally one of succeeding in the primary product line or going out of business. The paper that couldn't make a go of it generally sold out to another publisher or closed shop.

In today's industrial organization, the principal motivation is for optimization of return, through whatever organizational decisions it requires to achieve that return. While the earlier form of organization worked against transferring efforts to a different product line, conglomerate organization makes it feasible to acquire substantially different lines of service or products which allow for diversification into areas far afield from the original corporate product.

One might expect that as newspapers come under distant corporate ownership, the criterion of profit maximization will become paramount. This does not by itself mean the end of information as a public service; as Galbraith

has pointed out, the dual criteria of social mission and market performance may coexist easily as long as the organization grows and is successful (22). This does suggest that where success is in doubt, the criterion for change will be profit rather than continuation of production of the primary information product. In the interest of serving advertisers, daily papers have in several cases reduced circulation to certain groups having marginal economic and political status. In 1976, the combined daily circulation of the Minneapolis Star and Tribune exceeded 25 percent of the households in 24 non-metropolitan counties of Minnesota outside the metropolitan area. In 1980, circulation exceeded that level in only 14 counties outside the metro area (23).

As a preliminary probe into the consequences of changing newspaper ownership, a separate analysis of conflict reporting was conducted among the 21 daily newspapers for 1979, of which roughly half were owned either locally or by groups within Minnesota, and half were owned by groups with headquarters outside the state (24). The results of this comparison are in Table 6.

In spite of an extremely small number of cases, findings suggest substantially lower reporting of local conflict in those papers with multiple ownership and headquarters outside the state, compared to those with ownership within Minnesota. The overall difference is clear both for total local conflict and for conflict in local government alone. In the latter case, the newspapers under in-state ownership contain three times as much conflict on the average (30.9 vs. 9.3) as newspapers under out-of-state ownership. This pattern of difference in conflict reporting according to ownership departs only (a) in the Southwest where the overall reporting of conflict among dailies is extremely low regardless of ownership and (b) in the Northeast, where reporting of total conflict is higher among dailies headquartered outside the state.

Table 6. Ownership status of 21 daily newspapers, region and reporting of local conflict, 1979 only

	Region				
	North-east (n:6)	South-east (n:8)	South-west (n:4)	North-west (n:3)	Total (n:21)
Total local conflict, average column inches					
Locally owned or ownership within state*	54.0 (3)	46.0 (4)	6.0 (1)	59.0 (2)	47.0 (10)
Multiple ownership, headquarters outside state	70.7 (3)	20.0 (4)	6.7 (3)	0 (1)	28.4 (11)
Conflict in local government, ave. col. inches					
Locally owned or ownership within state	47.3 (3)	24.5 (4)	0 (1)	34.5 (2)	30.9 (10)
Multiple ownership, headquarters outside state	25.0 (3)	4.7 (4)	2.7 (3)	0 (1)	9.3 (11)

* These 10 papers include two whose headquarters are not in the local community. One is owned by a small group headquarterd in another community in the same county, and the other is part of a two-newspaper group, whose owner is located in a different county.

A similar comparison among nondailies is not feasible, since only four of the 62 were under out-of-state ownership. It might be pointed out, however, that three of these four nondailies (including the two semi-weeklies mentioned above) contained no conflict in 1979, and the one that did is located in the northeast and had an extremely high level of conflict, arising from a labor-management issue at a taconite plant.

Daily papers under in-state ownership in 1979 contain roughly half again as much local government conflict as the weeklies, and far more than the semi-weeklies. Also, these dailies contain more local government conflict than either weeklies or semi-weeklies.

One might also ask whether out-of-state ownership is a primary factor in these differences, or whether such ownership developed for newspapers that were fundamentally different initially. An examination of the 21 papers indicates that the 11 daily papers owned by out-of-state corporations were in larger communities; they averaged about 20,600 in 1980 population, compared with 12,514 for the papers that continued to be owned by in-state individuals or groups. On the basis of pluralism alone, one would expect these papers in larger communities to contain more local government conflict; yet, such is clearly not the case. The conclusion that the shift in ownership may have been instrumental in the content change is supported by the findings in table 7.

Table 7. Reporting of local conflict in government, according to ownership in 1979, by 21 Minnesota daily papers*

	Year	Ave. col. inches
Locally owned, or ownership headquarters inside state (n:10)		
	1965	23.4
	1979	30.9
Multiple ownership, headquarters outside state (n:11)		
	1965	17.2
	1979	9.3

* Two of these papers, one under local ownership and one under out-state-ownership in 1979, were semi-weeklies in 1965.

Based as they are on a small number of cases, these data must be considered speculative. At the same time, they suggest a need for further and deeper exploration of the relationship between ownership, as one aspect of media structure, and characteristics of reporting. These findings do not stand alone; they are consistent with Thrift's earlier finding that a sample of daily newspapers in California, Oregon and Washington published fewer

argumentative editorials on local issues after being purchased by chains (25). To the extent that this relationship is found in future research, it would raise a series of questions about the consequences of media organization for the flow of information to citizen groups. As indicated above, there is documented "pullback" of daily papers to urban and metropolitan areas. If ownership operates in certain structures to lead to a "pullback" of reporting certain kinds of social issues, the consequences for citizen adjustment to the resultant change in the information environment would seem to require close inspection.

Summary

Conflict reporting in 83 Minnesota newspapers was compared during a sample month in 1965 with the comparable period in 1979, over a period during which most regions of the state experienced a growth in population, an increase in manufacturing activity, and a decrease in proportion of income from farming.

The 83 newspapers as a group had larger newsholes in 1979 than in 1965. The increase in size of newshole was greater in weeklies than in daily or semi-weekly newspapers, and was greater in the less pluralistic regions of the state.

These newspapers reported a greater amount of local conflict in all sectors and more conflict in local government than they did 14 years earlier. The increases were greatest in the less pluralistic regions and in weeklies, where the increase in newshole was most pronounced.

Semi-weeklies had the least conflict of all newspaper types, a finding partially explained by the concentration of semi-weeklies in the less pluralistic regions. The 1965 finding that daily newspapers reported more local conflict than weekly newspapers was reversed in 1979, and this reversal is

related to the changing ownership status of daily newspapers. Those which had come under out-of-state ownership in 1979 reported less conflict that year than those whose ownership was within the state, as well as less conflict than the same papers had reported in 1965 when they were locally-owned.

The changing pattern of conflict reporting in these community newspapers appears to be related to increased interdependence among communities and substantial changes in the organization of mass communication media, including the pullback of metropolitan newspapers and changes in ownership status of the papers.

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14. One of the basic purposes of the 1965 study was to determine factors associated with the success of purposive communicators in achieving space in the press. County agents were the purposive sources under study and this aspect of the study led to the original methodological decision to concentrate on the editions carrying agricultural extension news. See P. J. Tichenor, C. N. Olien and G. A. Donohue, "Predicting a source's success in placing news in the media," Journalism Quarterly 31:32-42, 1967.

15. Five newspapers which had been semi-weeklies in 1965 changed their frequencies of publication during the next 14 years, two to daily and three to weekly.

16. Coding reliability was established at the start of the 1979 coding, using the same coding instructions applied in the 1965 analysis. Intercoder reliability scores for the test items, for all pairs of coders, were above .85. Microfilms of the newspapers were supplied through the courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

17. These regional differences are parallel to those found in long-term reporting about local issues in five northeast and five southwest communities in Minnesota in 1980. See Donohue, Olien and Tichenor, 1982, op. cit.

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